

Pregnancy-associated listeriosis in Hispanic women in FoodNet Sites, 1996-2003

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Background. Listeriosis is a serious infection most commonly caused by eating food contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes*. Each year in the United States, nearly 2,500 persons are infected with *L. monocytogenes* resulting in approximately 500 deaths. About one-third of *L. monocytogenes* infections occur during pregnancy. Infections during pregnancy commonly result in miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery, or infection of the newborn. Foods associated with listeriosis include deli meat and unpasteurized soft cheeses. In recent years, several outbreaks of listeriosis caused by Mexican-style cheese (e.g., queso fresco) made from unpasteurized milk have been identified, predominantly among Hispanic women.

Methods. We examined population-based surveillance data collected via the Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet) from 1996 through 2003 to determine the burden of disease and trends in pregnancy-associated *Listeria monocytogenes* infection. Infections were classified as “pregnancy-associated” if illness occurred in a pregnant woman or an infant <31 days old.

Results. A total of 766 invasive cases (3.6 cases per million population per year) of *L. monocytogenes* infection were ascertained in the surveillance population from 1996 through 2003. Of these, 122 (4.3 cases per million) were pregnancy-associated. From 1996 to 2003, the incidence of pregnancy-associated listeriosis declined by 37%. Pregnancy-associated disease was much more common among Hispanic women of child-bearing age (11.6 cases per million) than among non-Hispanic women of child-bearing age (3.5 cases per million).

Conclusion. Pregnancy-associated listeriosis disproportionately affects Hispanic women. Further declines in listeriosis incidence require continued efforts of industry and government to reduce contamination of the food supply and to educate clinicians and consumers, particularly pregnant and/or Hispanic women, about risks factors for *Listeria* infection.